

The 2016 Commonwealth Short Story Prize attracted nearly 4000 entries from 47 countries. Twenty-six "fresh and unexpected" stories by writers from eleven countries make up the shortlist. After an initial sift by a team of international readers, the global judging panel, representing each of the five regions of the Commonwealth – Helon Habila (Africa), Firdous Azim (Asia), Pierre Mejlak (Canada and Europe) Olive Senior (Caribbean), and Patrick Holland



Sumon Rahman
PHOTO COURTESY: ARITRA ANKAN MITRA

(Pacific) – chose the shortlist. Chair of the judges, South African novelist and playwright Gillian Slovo, said of this year's shortlist: "As a novelist accustomed to the luxury of the long form it has been a treat to discover writers who manage to crystallise such different experiences into so few words. The stories we have chosen for the shortlist are in turn comic, touching, poetic, mysterious but always fresh and unexpected." Sumon Rahman's short story, *Niroporadh Ghum* (Innocent Sleep), was shortlisted for this year's Commonwealth Short Story Prize. As a matter of fact, he is the only Bangladeshi to ever be shortlisted

for this particular prize. Before this, there was the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the best first book, which Tahmima Anam was selected for and had also won in 2008. This particular prize, the Short Story Prize, has been around since 2012 only. Sumon Rahman is a Bangladesh poet, fiction writer and cultural analyst. He has written two books of poems, a collection of short stories and a book of essays on cultural studies, all in Bangla. Apart from that he writes regularly in national newspapers and international referred journals, on various issues of art, pop



| ACHIEVEMENT |

NIROPORADH GHUM GOES TO COMMONWEALTH

NAZIBA BASHER

culture and society. He has taught Philosophy and South Asian Studies while he was a Teaching Assistant in the National University of Singapore, and is currently teaching Media Studies and Journalism at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

His short story, *Niroporadh Ghum*, portrays the culture of fear in our society in a very elusive manner. "It's a fiction work on extra-judicial killings. It shows how the narrative of crossfire is produced while all its agencies are not entirely inhuman, so the structure appears to be a very uncanny existence with the kindness of individual human characters. There is no particular villain in my story" says Sumon.

It would be difficult not to say that the story was not inspired by reality. "We have had a culture of fear in our society. We have even seen a history of 'crossfires' and such, which have been mentioned in the story. So yes, it was somewhat inspired by the on-goings in our country, our society."

Sumon wrote this story back in 2010, but was inspired recently to send it into the competition. "It never really crossed my mind. In fact, I didn't even know about it. My friend sent me the link to

- Is that you, Rashed?
- How are you, Ma?
In the dim light of the evening, neither of these questions created an agonising need to reply. I reached behind me to shut the gate, while Ma started walking ahead of me along the corridor. It was long, the paint flaking off the walls. The first door on the left was mine, the next, Shahed's. On the right the first room was the kitchen, followed

by the dining room. The corridor led to my parents' room. This was how it was, wasn't it? The room would be lit up brightly earlier, but they were dark now. Only the door to Ma's room was open. I followed her.
- They released me today. The RAB officer said, go home, Rashed saab. We are sorry, you're not the man we were looking for. Then they admitted me to a hospital. I got my release after three days.

and I thought of taking my chances. I hadn't translated the work beforehand, but sent it anyway since they were taking in submissions in different languages. They then assigned someone to translate the story into English," says Sumon.

In the year 1994, he published his first book, which was an anthology of poems titled "Jhijhit". His next book, which was an edited anthology called 'Dekha, Nah Dekhar Chokh' ended up in the list of Best Sellers of that year's Ekushey Boi Mela. In 2008, he compiled seven short stories written by him in a book called 'Goribi Omorota' and had it published. In the same year, he wrote and published a poetry book called 'Ceramic er Nijersho Jhogra'. And lastly, in 2011, he wrote and published a book called 'Kanaar Haat Bazaar', which revolved around the

subjects he mastered in throughout his academic years- cultural studies and pop culture.

In 2013, Sumon joined University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh (ULAB) as Associate Professor, Department of Media Studies and Journalism. "Being a part of ULAB has given me a lot of benefits. The university funds researches and that has come very much in handy for me as I have always had a passion for researching and writing based on what I research," says Sumon. Sumon also plans on writing a novel. "This time, I'm moving away from the academics and indulging into my creativity," exclaims Sumon. With 20 years of experience in different kinds of writing, Sumon finds it both exciting and unnerving to step into the realm of creativity in the form of a novel. ■

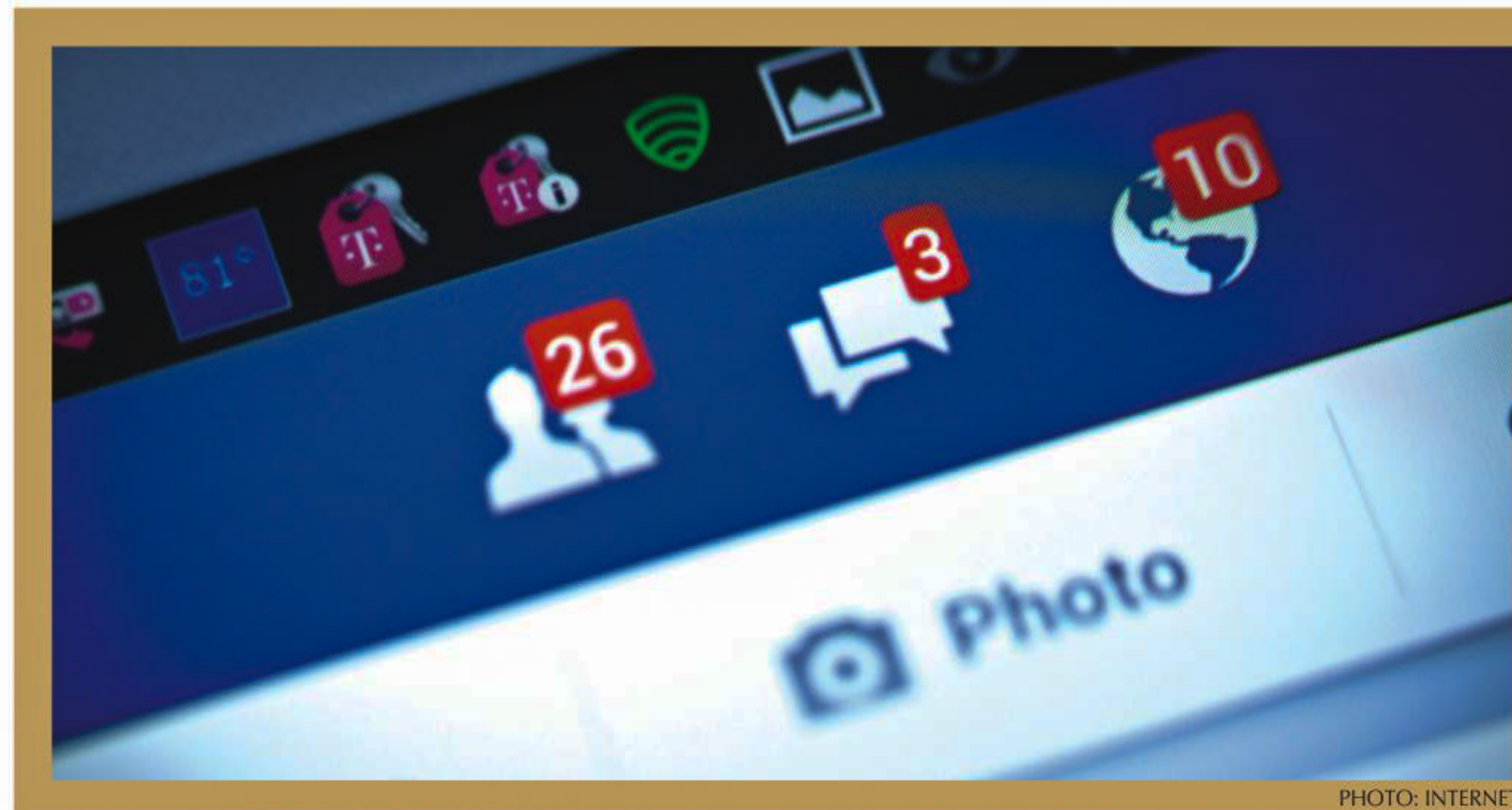
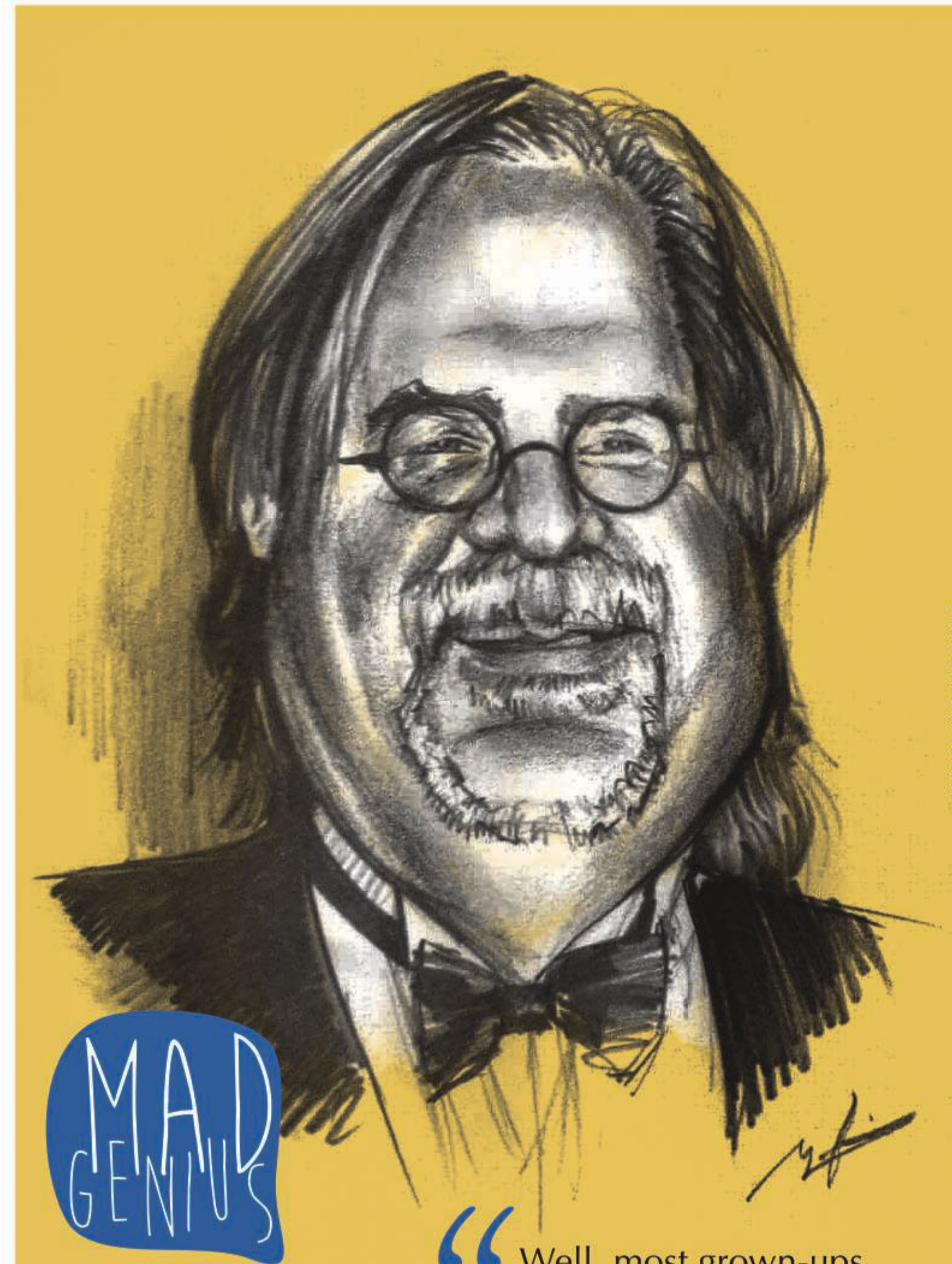


PHOTO: INTERNET

| NUMBERS |

1.8 crore

The total number of facebook users Bangladesh has right now. With such heavy usage countrywide, facebook is not only serving as a personal social networking tool, but also it is being used for different business activities.



SKETCH: YARIZ SIDDIQUI

MATT GROENING
(born February 15, 1954)

Matthew Abram "Matt" Groening is an American cartoonist, writer, producer, animator, and voice actor. His show "The Simpsons" has earned him the top spot on his fans' minds. It is the longest running U.S. primetime television series in history, as well as the longest running animated series and sitcom. Groening has won 12 Primetime Emmy Awards, ten for The Simpsons and two for Futurama as well as a British Comedy Award for "outstanding contribution to comedy" in 2004. In 2002, he won the National Cartoonist Society Reuben Award for his work on Life in Hell. He received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on February 14, 2012.

“Well, most grown-ups forget what it was like to be a kid. I vowed that I would never forget.

If I have one technology tip of the day, it's this: No matter how good the video on YouTube is, don't read the comments, just don't, because it will make you hate all humans.

You've got to embrace the future. You can whine about it, but you've got to embrace it.

People go into cartooning because they're shy and they're angry. That's when you're sitting in the back of a classroom drawing the teacher.

I thought I was going to make crazy cartoons for the rest of my life. I didn't think I'd ever get paid for it, didn't think I drew well enough, but I knew it made me happy.”

STARSTORY

AN OUTRAGEOUS ENCOUNTER

Last Thursday as I was about to get out of my car, when three women came rushing to me and threatened me rudely, "If you don't give us money, a black snake living inside this wooden box will bite you and kill you." I looked at them in surprise as one of them demanded five hundred taka from me. I told her that I am a student and I do not have the money. Then another woman commanded her companion to throw faeces at me and jeered such a way that boiled my blood. The bystanders just watched silently, in fact there were a few policemen standing nearby. Their attitude confirmed that such incidents take place everyday. To my utter horror, the moment those women saw another boy of my age some distance away; they ran towards him. I was disgusted by the way these women were earning money. All of them looked physically fit to earn their livelihood some other way instead of carrying a fake snake with them.
Esaba Ahnaf
Maple Leaf International School, Dhaka

WHERE ARE WE HEADING?



It was a Thursday morning and I was in my class. Eventhough all the other schools were closed that day due to Union Parisad Election, we decided to keep our kindergarten open. Suddenly a woman rushed into our school premises wailing. I did not know her but I felt sympathy for her. Abdur Rahman, another teacher of our school happened to know her well. She was mother of Asadullah, a student in class three. When we asked her what happened, she replied that her nephew had just been shot at the nearby polling station in Madhurchar. Now she asked for permission for Asadullah to go with her to her bothers home. Immediately we allowed him to go with his mother. While going back the woman asked for 'Dua' again and again for his nephew.

The next day I was shocked looking at the news on the first page of *The Daily Star* titled 'A grief stricken father wailing touching the face of his son...' Even before we could overcome the grief of Shohagi Jahan Tonu's death, we were again hit by the killing of Shuvo Kazi Shrabon, a ten year old school boy, who got killed by a stray bullet in the up election violence. What was his crime? All he wanted was to go to the polling centre and see people vote. In the afternoon as I went out for a walk, I saw many people enjoying the victory of their candidates. I did not feel happy, even for a moment. In fact Shrabon's face kept haunting me again and again. I remembered his parent shocked at the untimely death of their beloved son. How long do we have to wait to see violence-free election in our country?

Enamul Hasan
Ashabus Suffah Kindergarten, Karaniganj, Dhaka